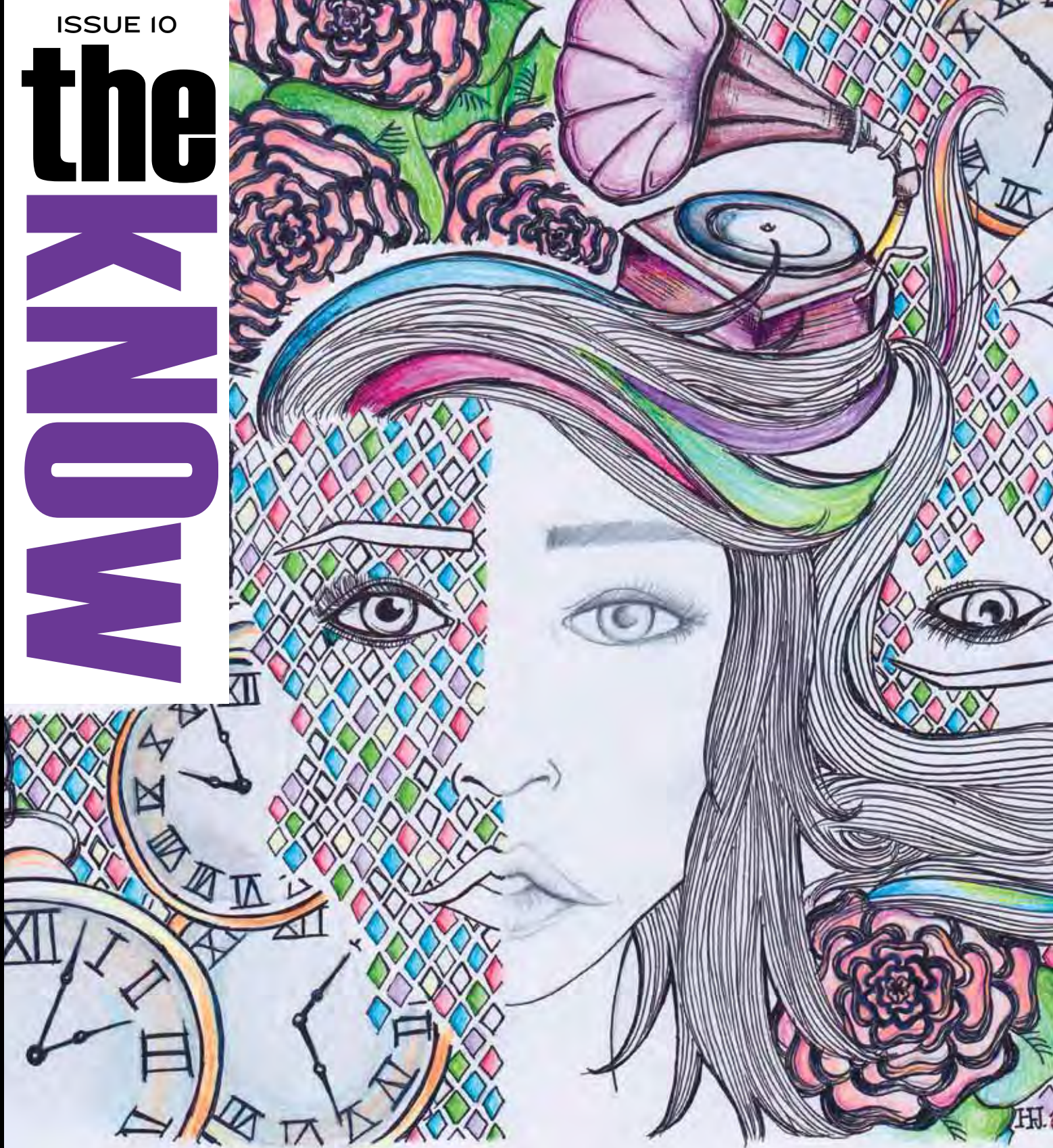


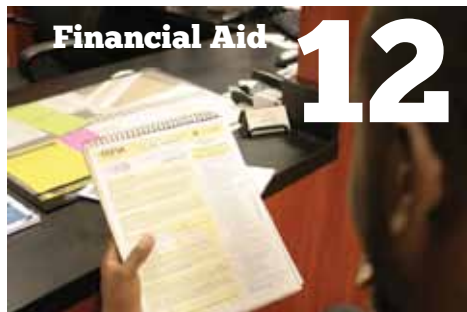
the KNOW



MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

INSIDE: Caring for the Environment, Getting Out of the Gang Life, Getting Financial Aid and more.

The kNOW Issue 10 Contents



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The kNOw

Youth Voice Of The Central Valley
Spring 2013 | Issue 10

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The kNOw Magazine is published by Pacific News Service/New America Media, and is made possible by grants from the California Endowment, Pacific Gas & Electric and The Cultural Arts Rotary Club of Fresno.

© 2006-2013 The kNOw Youth Media, a project of Pacific News Service/New America Media, 275 Ninth Street, San Francisco CA 94103

The views expressed in this publication are those of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the views of any of the partners.



Since arriving at The kNOw this summer, each day has brought a new adventure and a new challenge. The youth and I were eager to get to know one another right from the start and together we've seen members come and go. Since the release of Issue 9 each member has contributed compelling stories to be uncovered and nourished.

This issue's body of work has a strong theme: the challenges of our community are not simple and it will take investigating beyond the

surface to make real change. We urge you to see the depth in our youth's personal experiences, such as Jane and Miguel's stories on school discipline (p. 8), Phillip's journey to visit Uganda, where his parents are from (p. 14), and Adriana's reporting on



environmental awareness among youth (p. 16). Many of the written pieces touch on struggles specific to Fresno, how we're addressing these issues, what solutions are developing, and how these topics affect many in our community and humanity at large.

Youth at The kNOw often struggle to make it to our weekly meetings without means of transportation and often no cell phone access. They work tirelessly to put together a consistently growing media platform that gives light to topics that impact our lives every day. I'm so honored to be apart of this amazing organization and that I'm able to be a witness to growth in the lives of wonderful young people as they share their stories and the stories of their community.

Marci Lopez, editor and Youth Media Coordinator

Perceptions of Homelessness

By Parker Anderton



Bill, a homeless Vietnam veteran, is also a father and a grandparent. He collects recycleables around town, including the Fulton Mall, to pay his bills.

When I'm out in public and see someone who looks to be homeless I don't look the other way; I help them. People have a tendency to look the other way, give dirty and judgmental looks, accuse them of wrongdoing, and generally treat them as lesser people. Many think they chose to be on the streets and don't have an urge to get back on their feet and start new. It makes me sad whenever I see and hear all these false assumptions. Through the experiences I've had working with the homeless I know many of them are very educated, nice, and helpful and all deserve a chance to regain a stable living.

Most of the homeless I've met did not choose to be homeless. I've met some who were very successful but lost everything due to injuries, divorces, lay-offs, and even depression. My family and I know a woman named Melony who struggles to find work and retain her home. Melony's story is similar to many who cannot find work for various reasons. Her life began to unravel after being laid off from her job at an elderly care facility. Although her two successful sons have asked her countless times to stay with them and help her, she simply replies that it is her problem and hers to fix. Melony maintains the home she

had before losing her job but due to her age, has found that panhandling is her only option for work. Personally knowing Melony before her lay off and later struggles we hope that she can find work soon. While she is out panhandling we also hope that people are tender to her, her unspoken story and her attempt to regain stability.

Since learning of Melony's hard time, my family and I serve the community twice a year by handing out homemade meals, and articles of clothing to the homeless. After doing this for a couple years we started to build relationships and trust among the homeless communities. Once trust was built we would stay and have lunch, talk with them about life, ask what their housing was like and if they needed anything. If they asked for money we would kindly ask if they would like any items like clothes, food, dog food, gift cards to use in the future, or other things. Some would ask for the littlest of things like: a deck of cards or baby wipes. Others would ask for bigger, needier items such as hygiene products, first aid kits, heavy duty blankets and jackets; things that would help them get through daily life.

Though it feels good to know you've helped someone and made their life a little easier or more comfortable, at times it is still dangerous. Once, while distributing supplies in Fresno, an older

gentleman looked at my family and me with fear, ran up to our truck and told us to get out of where we were that instant. The man told us that the homeless living in the area were sleeping behind the bushes, only 15 feet away from us, didn't like strangers and were sometimes violent. We did as we were told and hurried off but not before we thanked him for the warning and handed him a thick jacket and some hot chili.

Most recently, I had the opportunity to stay in San Francisco for a week and serve their homeless community first hand. Over the summer I worked with the Center for Student Missions, a Christian nonprofit that works to introduce youth to problems that exist in urban settings. Their mission statement is to provide an effective urban ministry experience that transforms lives, influences churches and communities, and honors Christ. The people who experience CSM are housed in 10 different major cities across the United States, including San Francisco, New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Boston, Denver, Houston, Nashville, Washington DC and Philadelphia.

During my stay with CSM, I spent a couple days with children from low-income families who are in either a Day Home or a neighborhood program. One of the days, we were split into groups in which we were given two dollars each and had 3-4 hours to find a homeless person, buy them and ourselves lunch, and then interview them to see what it's like being homeless in San Francisco, specifically the Tenderloin District (one of the poorest neighborhoods in the country). My group of five, who all together had about \$10, decided to buy about seven chicken sandwiches to hand out and get to know more people rather than just one. We didn't mind being hungry since we knew it would go toward feeding the homeless and the fact that we would have dinner waiting for us when we were done with the day.

Working with Center for Student Missions taught me that homelessness is not exclusive to any age or race. Before the trip, I had worked closely with homeless people but this experience dramatically changed my perspective and personality toward others, especially the

The California Homeless Youth Project

What is it like to be young and homeless? In these interviews, young people ask their homeless peers about life on the street. Watch at cahomelessyouth.library.gov



The Street Through My Eyes



Houseless, Not Homeless



From on the Street to Off - With a Pet



From Seeking Service to Providing Service



My Son Saved My Life



From Pillar to Post



Emancipated to the Street



Bicycle is Key to Survival



Photo: Parker Anderton

On a typical walk down the Fulton Mall, a pedestrian-only hub of activity on downtown Fresno's Fulton Street, you'll see some of Fresno's homeless population.

overall view of homeless.

Helping the homeless gives me a sense of connection with my city and helps me open my eyes and heart to the stereotypes people believe and perpetuate about homelessness. Fresno was recently ranked third worst in the country when it came to homelessness, just ahead of New Orleans and Tampa. Organizations like Fresno First Steps Home have realized this increasing topic and are here to help by getting homeless off the streets, back on their feet, and once again a stable part of society. Like those affected by homelessness, we've all experienced being excluded for not living to society's expectations and we can all try to remember that homelessness can touch anyone's life and affect all of our communities. **tk**

Helping the homeless gives me a sense of connection with my city and helps me open my eyes and heart to the stereotypes people believe and perpetuate about homelessness.



Young Gangsters

The truth about teens living the gang life.

By Antonio Flores

Gangs are something I have dealt with since I was a kid. Considering that I live here in Fresno, it isn't surprising that I would see gang violence as I grew up. Gang wars and fights occur very often here. For instance, five shootings all occurred within 12 hours on October 27th and were the result of a gang feud. In many cities this is an extreme amount of violence, but it's not unusual here.

I have family members and friends that were at one time affiliated with gang activity. I have in a way gotten used to it since I have been around it so long. Gang activity is something I witness almost every day.

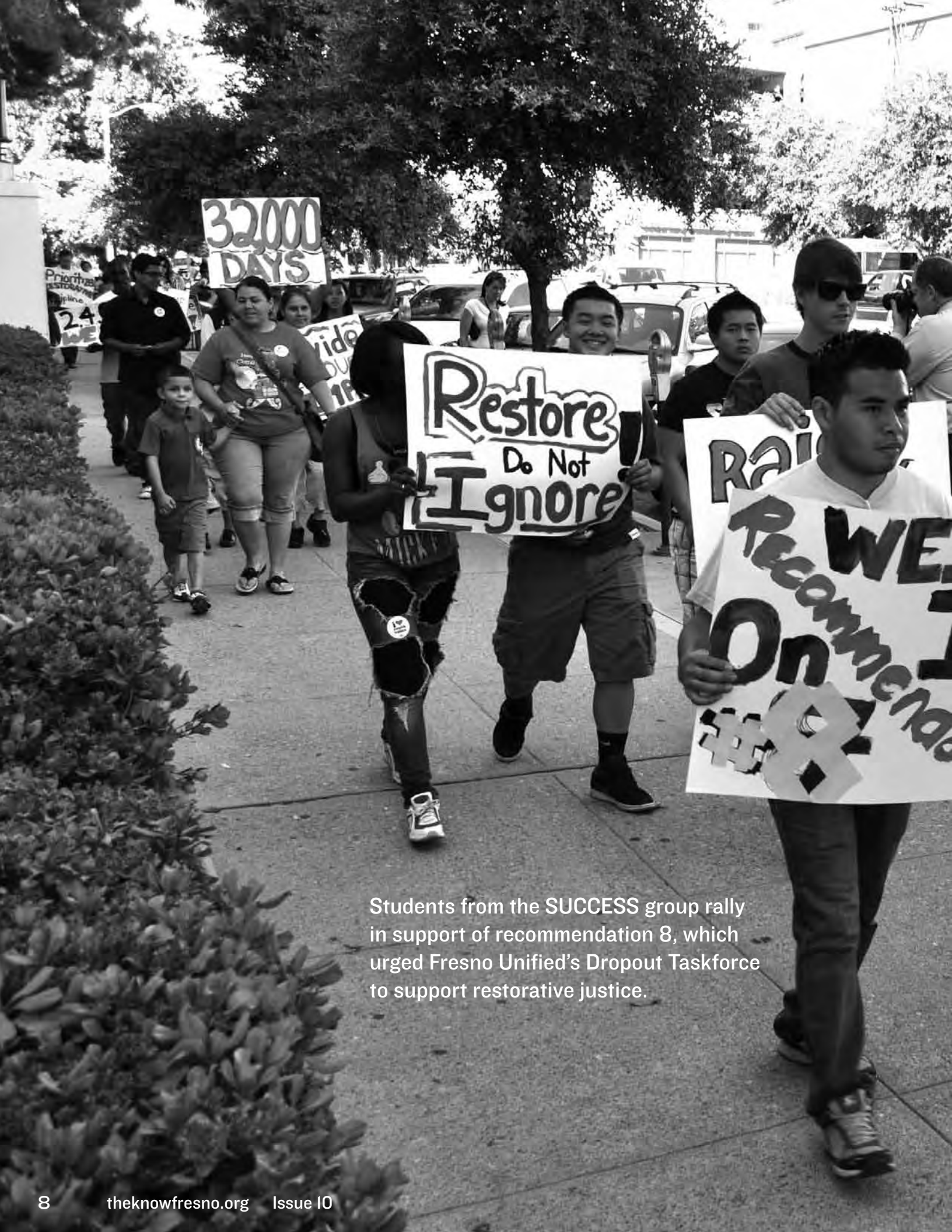
Gangs have evolved quite a bit over the years. Today's gangs are not organized very well which makes it even more chaotic, and some of them do not even have a leader and are

just cliques who give themselves a street title. These gangs take in children as young as 9-13.

New members do a "jump-in," an activity that is part of a larger initiation process to see if they are bold enough to enter the gang "family." The jump-in is nothing easy to do: the person there for the initiation must take a beating for up to 6-8 minutes. Other parts of the initiation include mugging someone, killing a rival gang member, robbing a store or any other act of crime. These young children join gangs because their friends do it, for a higher reputation, or because they feel as if it is an actual family that they can go to. Some are noticed for a skill, like gun use, tagging, fighting, drug dealing or robbery and are asked to join.

Some people that are brought into gangs are recruited from smaller groups like tagger crews.

Continued on page 30



Students from the SUCCESS group rally in support of recommendation 8, which urged Fresno Unified's Dropout Taskforce to support restorative justice.



Fresno Unified Students Aim *to* Remake School Discipline

By Miguel Bibanco

More than three years ago, a group of Fresno youths launched an effort to remake the city's public education system. We knew that too many young people were dropping out of high school and we wanted to stop this epidemic.

This youth team called itself SUCCESS (Students United to Create a Climate of Engagement Support and Safety), and we did a tremendous amount of research over the past few years.

With support from The California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities initiative, organizations like The kNOw Youth Media and Youth Leadership Institute held focus groups with Fresno Unified students, parents and teachers to find out how they really feel about their schools.

The consensus -- Fresno Unified's discipline system needed some dramatic changes.

Our focus groups told us that Fresno Unified's current

discipline practices and policies are unfair and inconsistent, impede healthy adult-student relationships and hinder academic achievement.

So SUCCESS set out on a mission to rally youth and adults --- particularly Superintendent Michael Hanson --- to bring restorative justice to Fresno Unified. Restorative justice is an alternative to the

no-tolerance policies that use suspension and expulsion to discipline kids.

Instead, restorative justice uses forgiveness and mediation to repair the harm a student has caused, restore relationships between adults and kids in school, and teach young people how to avoid repeating their mistakes. It works in other school districts, and we know it could work in Fresno Unified.

We held conferences, met with the superintendent and talked to restorative justice experts across the state. We were convinced we had found a solution. When the Fresno Unified Graduation Task Force was put together, SUCCESS

**So SUCCESS set
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Unified.**

jumped at the opportunity to have a seat at the table and give students a voice in reforming our school district. We had a representative on the task force, rallied before a school board meeting and talked with the media. And it worked -- the task force recommendations call for introducing restorative justice in schools. Change is happening.

I just started my senior year at Edison High School, and many of these changes will come long after I'm gone. But I'm hopeful that Fresno Unified remains committed to restorative justice and that the efforts of SUCCESS help students for years to come. Young people need this change to have a better shot at graduating and going to college, and with their success, the whole city will have a brighter future. **tk**

These pieces were written in partnership with the Fresno Bee as part of a series of coverage around school discipline. More coverage on this topic can be found at:
fresnobee.com/justice
theknowfresno.org/restorative-justice

Wishing for A Better Way

By Jane Carretero

Jane wishes she had restorative justice, because she feels like teachers would have heard her side of the story.

My name is Jane Carretero and I am 15 years old. Toward the beginning of my eighth grade school year at Fort Miller I started doing drugs, and my mom found out about it.

One day, she and I got into a huge fight and she found a bottle of marijuana in my backpack. It was a difficult choice for her to make, but she ended up calling the police. They ended up taking me in for that.

After three days at juvenile hall, it finally hit me. I remember falling on my knees and I started crying for my mom, and I was like, "Why did I have to mess up so badly?"

When I went back to school, I had fallen behind a lot. A lot of people thought that I snitched them out. Some people even thought that I had gotten pregnant, and a lot of girls wanted to fight me, because they thought I was saying things about them.

The teacher started yelling at everyone, and he turned to me. I said,

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I was tired of people judging me. I've done a lot of bad things in my life, and I don't like people looking back at me and putting things in my face.

"You're yelling at us for no reason." Then the teacher said, "Don't talk back to me. I know kids like you. You're messed up in life, and you're going to mess up when you're older, too. You're going to go off to high school thinking you're all cool and pretty like that, thinking you're all hard. And you're going to get beat up one day by a girl better than you," he told me.

My mom taught me manners, and I didn't want to say anything back to him. I was tired of people judging me. I've done a lot of bad things in my life, and I don't like people looking back at me and putting things in my face. So I walked out.

I ended up sneaking into a couple of classrooms. When school ended, I left campus through the side gate, because I had found out that they were looking for me. I didn't want to get in trouble. It was a stupid decision, of course.

I had forgotten that the school had my iPod, so I tried to walk back onto the campus. When I asked for it, they said, "No, you left." I said, "No, I didn't." They called me a liar and yelled at me in front of everyone. They ended up suspending me two days. I was more afraid of going back to juvenile hall than of facing the consequences when I went back to school after being suspended.

After two days of being suspended I went back to school. As one of my teachers was taking attendance, he asked where everyone was. I wanted to say something bad, and I said, "Up in beds, where we should all be."

After he kicked me out of his class for saying that, I found out he wrote down that I said, "Up your ass" when he asked where everyone was.

Right when I walked into the school office, one of the staff said, "It's her. Suspend her." She didn't even look at my file.

It wasn't just about being suspended, it was more to me. I risked being locked up again and being sent to juvenile hall. This time, I wouldn't have been locked up for two or three weeks, but three months for violation.

Jane Carretero now attends Edison High School. She heard about restorative justice when she was a member of The kNow Youth Media. She remembered her own experience with school discipline in middle school and wrote the following poem.

I Know Kids Like You

*It was last year
beginning of 8th grade
I started doing drugs
me and my mom had a huge fight
she found my stash of marijuana
she called the police
after 3 days -- it hit me
falling on my knees, crying for my mom
why did i have to mess up so badly*

*I went back to school, I had fallen behind
The teacher started yelling at everyone
he turned at me and said
I know kids like you
you're messed up in life
you're gonna mess up when you're older too
you're gonna get beat up one day by a girl better than
you
My mom taught me manners
ENOUGH
I didn't want to tell him anything*

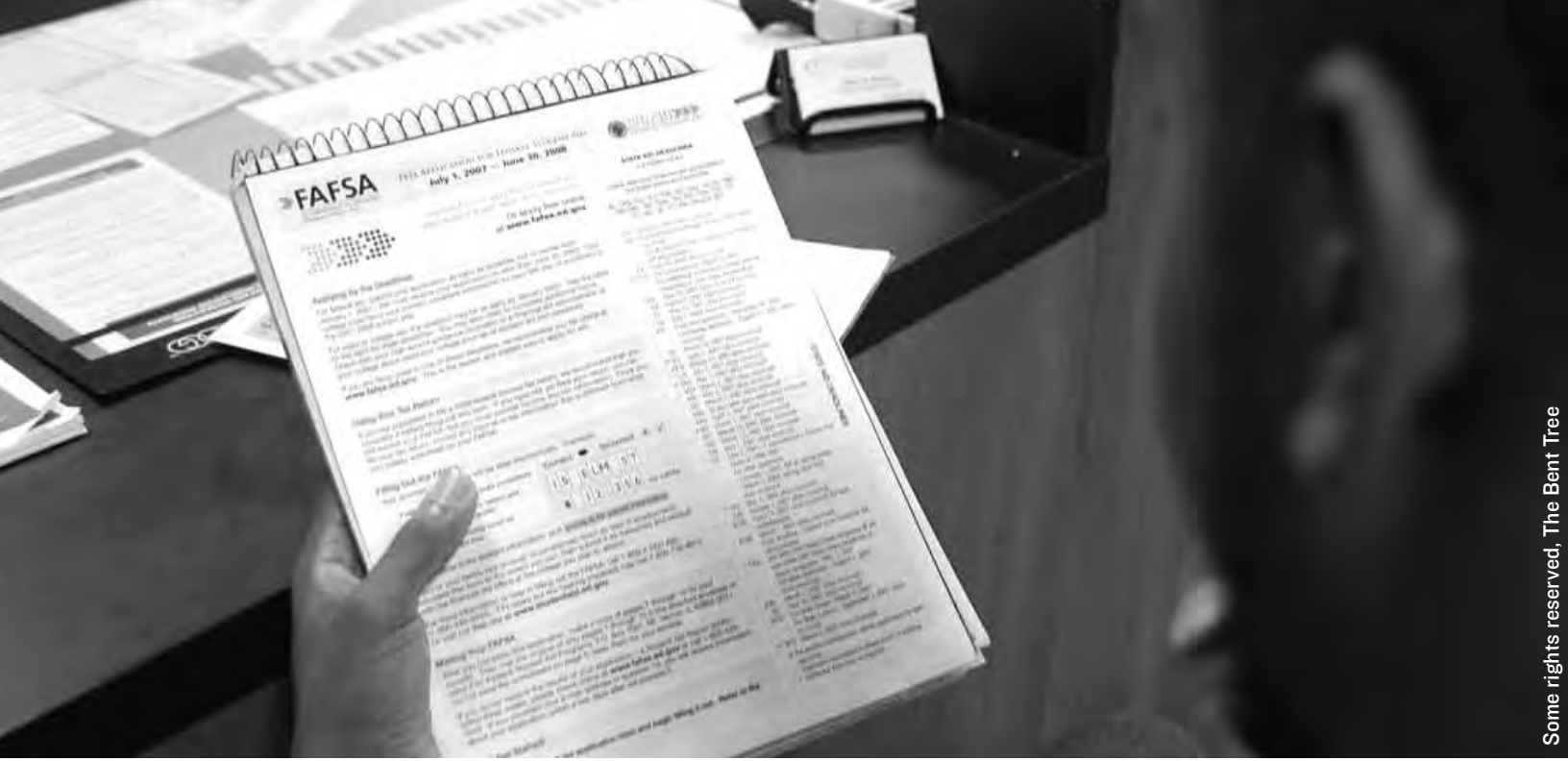
*tired of people judging me
I've done a lot of bad things in my life*

*They suspended me for two days
More afraid to go back to juvenile hall
then face the consequences at school*

I was sent to the office, kicked out of class AGAIN

*It's her, they said
Suspend her!
But I wouldn't just be suspended
I would be locked up. Again.
not just for two or three weeks this time
but for three MONTHS*

why did i have to mess up so badly



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Who Deserves Financial Aid?

By Christina Tran

For any high school senior, this concluding year is stressful on many interchangeable extremes. One path grasps enough passing credits to graduate, while another path is striving for higher education beyond high school. As a senior I know this firsthand. My already busy schedule was becoming constantly busier by the hour, filled with college admission forms and endless searches for family financial records to complete the even longer process of applying for financial aid. On top of the applications that require much attention, school assignments and numerous extra curricular activities began to pile up.

The first few months of senior year I thought to myself, "Hey, this isn't that bad. I'm not tired of school just yet." At that time I didn't think applying for college would be the least bit stressful. The idea didn't even cross my mind. I'd maintained a 3.88 cumulative GPA while being involved in various character-building organizations up

I thought I would be a shoo-in to receive financial assistance for college.

to this point. I thought I would be a shoo-in to receive financial assistance for college.

Beginning the whole process was simple; there wasn't much that needed to be done, except filling in general information. Then I came across a page that asked for family

income, and not knowing where to find that information, I asked for help. When I got the answer I needed, I put in the estimated amount of the family income that was generally made each year. When the application was finished, there was an option for a fee waiver for low-income families that I applied for and was later denied. Since that time, I have done my best to contact the Office of Admissions to appeal the denied application fee waiver and for weeks there wasn't any helpful feedback. After speaking to the Ambassador of my potential colleges, I was able to apply for a petition against my denied fee waiver.

With this unresolved situation, patience was all that was left. None of my phone calls or emails were returned. Typically, the solution to my problem would be to pay the fee that is required and mail the petition to the school's Admissions office. Unfortunately without the fee waiver, paying the fee wasn't an option for me. After long

nights of stress and annoying headaches, I sent another email to my school counselor, explaining my situation to see what else could be done to submit my application in time.

As I waited for a satisfying response, old conversations filled my mind with anxiety. Before talking to the Ambassador, I asked my brother if he could help me fix my problem, considering he attended the school that I applied to. His response to my plea for assistance was, "If you were denied a fee waiver, you won't get financial aid, either." Those words constantly played in my head during class, and I thought to myself, "What else can be done if my fee waiver wasn't approved?" So day after day I continued to search for new ways to speak to someone who could possibly help me. Day after day I was left at square one. The extra effort didn't get me anywhere, and pessimistic thoughts set in. All this negativity left me bitter about attending college.

Friends would talk with me about applying for scholarships and financial aid, but they didn't understand the situation I was in. Scholarships and financial aid wouldn't be enough to pay my dues. I also feared my sibling was correct in informing me that being denied a fee waiver would result in the loss of all aid.

Shortly after this, my Advanced Composition teacher led a discussion covering many of my unanswered aid questions. I learned about the financial aid process, including who and why recipients are given aid. Because of my struggle in getting aid, I started to investigate financial aid on a deeper level, believing in the principle that students should be able to attend college, even when they don't have the money.

The more I asked around, the more I realized the aid process is difficult for many people: "I think applying for financial aid was a little nerve wracking," said Blair Eliason, my former Advanced Placement teacher. "I was worried I would not be awarded aid, but it turns out I was approved for a student loan and I received a grant. So I was very happy about that. But I think the task of applying is a little daunting and unnerving."

As I investigated issues surrounding financial aid, I noticed other areas that should be improved, especially how students are selected to receive aid.

Affirmative Action ensures financial aid is given to more need-based students, and takes into consideration personal factors in order to benefit underrepresented groups. Affirmative Action has become a main determining factor in who earns government aid and which needy student can continue their education after high school. However, in the last half-century, statistics show that Asian-American students were not likely to receive any type of federal aid, in contrast to other racial/ethnic minority groups. Although need is the prime reason to provide aid to students that are willing to further their education, merit-based needs should be prioritized as well; equally distributed amongst the two.

The controversy surrounding the Dream Act further develops the issue of merit-based aid. The Dream Act would give protection for undocumented students, and this has stirred controversy due to the sensitive nature of immigration politics. The Dream Act will likely produce more college graduates within the United States, and by 2020, if the Act is implemented, the US would possess the highest rate of college graduates in the world. Opponents argue that federal dollars should prioritize existing citizens, not undocumented students.

I think financial aid should be given to students who deserve the money that they apply for. I believe students who put in the effort should be rewarded with assistance. There are many factors in dispensing government aid that need to be reworked in order for the system to be fair. Should students be reviewed and looked into closely, to know what they truly work for, or should they simply be given aid because of the financial need shown in their application?

Some students who belong to well-off families cannot depend on any financial support from their parents, but often are denied from federal assistance because of their parents' income. Other low-income families are not capable of financially supporting their student's college education. I suggest that there should be a separate essay for those wishing to claim financial assistance despite their family's income to benefit those students who

Continued on page 30

Students who are most likely to feel excluded from attending college deserve to know that even when the process is overwhelming, getting aid is possible.



The author enjoys volunteer work and is shown here with Bark for Life, which supports animals with cancer. This summer she and her fellow volunteers helped organize the Fight Back/Celebrate event at the Dog Park on El Capitan.



Back to Uganda

By Phillip Omeje

The author's mother was raised in Kampala, Uganda's capital city. When he accompanied her on a return trip to the city, his assumptions about the land and culture were proven wrong.

I don't really remember much about when I was little, but I do remember that my mom has always been in my life. She has been there for and knows all of the major events of my life, and yet I don't really know about the major events of her life like when she left Africa and came to America.

She came from the country of Uganda. She grew up in the country's capital, Kampala, with her two younger siblings and came to America in 1995 to be with my dad. He was also originally from Uganda and came to the States as a foreign exchange student in 1971. Not long after my mom arrived, they had me. They split up a few years later and now I mostly live with my mom, but I spend every other weekend with my dad and they seem to have an amicable relationship.

My mom recognizes there are benefits to living in the States, but leaving a place with family and childhood memories is never easy. When I asked her about it, she told me, "It's been great. There have been lots of great things, technology wise, but you can't erase the fact that you miss your family back home."

Throughout my childhood she has told me a little bit every now and then about what life in Uganda was like for her and how growing up there has made her who she is now. These stories made me wonder what Uganda was like. Eventually I got to find that out for myself when she took me to her home country.

It actually wasn't all that long ago that I was able to visit. I visited

I used to think that if I ever got to go to Africa I would do stuff like make weapons, fight dangerous wild animals, and spear fish for food.

Uganda when I was 13 or 14 years old, and my mom and I went there during spring break. I was originally just planning on staying home and sleeping for most of my break, only getting up when I got hungry, but when my mom told me about the trip I was surprised, excited and at the same time a little nervous. I was nervous because, for one thing, I had never been anywhere outside of America before, and another I didn't actually know much of anything about Uganda. I didn't know the language they spoke, I didn't know what kind of foods they ate (which could've been a problem for me because I'm a picky eater), I didn't know anything about the culture, and, while the people I was going to see were family members, they were all people I had never seen before. I'm not that good at talking with people, especially people I have never met before.

When I got there and met up with them I wasn't sure whether I should hug them or shake hands with them, but they were pretty nice. They welcomed me into their homes, they offered lots of food, and they showed me around. They were pretty curious about what life is like in America. When I was telling them about life in America I kept thinking about how life in America and life there isn't too different.

The foods they ate were much different, and the dishes actually tasted pretty good. My favorite meal there was turkey. There was one dish I



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didn't like, which was kind of a staple food there, called *matoke*. *Matoke* is made from plantains and wrapped in banana leaves, steamed and then mashed. It's kind of like mashed potatoes.

We stayed there for about two weeks and I have to admit it's not what I imagined it would be. I know this'll probably sound stupid, but I used to think that if I ever got to go to Africa I would do stuff like make weapons, fight dangerous wild animals, and spear fish for food. When I went there I saw that Africa was nothing like I had imagined it would be, for example I didn't think that they had TV there but they do. I didn't think they had cars there, but they do. In fact did you know that the cars they have in Uganda have the driver's side on the right side rather than the left, like we have it here in America? Uganda wasn't all that much like I'd imagined it.

While there are some similarities between America and Uganda, there are also differences between the two countries. For example the education system is different. In Uganda the grade level goes like this: first is primary level which over here is first-seventh grade, next is secondary level which here would be eighth-11th grade, and last is high school which lasts for about two years. If you count the average four years of college we would take here and three years of college there it all adds up to 16 years of education.

Only the primary levels are free, and for only four children per family. In order to pass from primary level to secondary level you have to pass a special test called the primary living exam. One of my mom's most memorable moments growing up was passing this test.

Even though I was bit nervous about this trip, when the trip was over I started thinking that I wouldn't mind staying a couple more days. Whenever I think about how skeptical about the trip I was I can't help but laugh at how silly my fears were.

I remember one of my last nights there, me and my cousin stayed up the whole night talking. We talked about all kinds of stuff: religion, politics, music, even girls. I was surprised by how comfortable I was talking about all these things with someone I had only known for a few days, I mean sure he is family but I was able to talk about things with him that I don't feel comfortable discussing with people I have known for years.

I went to Uganda with a whole bunch of fears that weren't based on any true information that I heard, it was all from my imagination. Now, looking back, these fears were kind of stupid. I realized that it's good to have imagination, but not to let your imagination take over. And I realized that sometimes, there's much more to a place or a people than we assume. **tk**

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The Environment: A young person's long lost friend

By Adriana Hernandez

Amelia Garrido, 18, gazes up through a fallen tree at the giant sequoias towering overhead in Kings Canyon National Park. Although she has lived an hour away in Fresno her whole life, this was her first visit to the park.

As the years progress we hear about more and more environmental disasters caused by humanity's mistreatment of the planet.

Just this year, droughts, Hurricane Sandy and home-destroying fires in Colorado, all linked to our warming planet, have taken a huge toll on our country.

Although the media exposes and covers them broadly, many youth do the minimum to aid in conserving our planet. As shocking as it might seem, I think teenagers are not putting effort into reducing, reusing and recycling. What is the cause of this pervasive sense of indifference? Is their lack of caring for the planet's current state a result of the many technological advances that have occurred in recent decades? Are all of these distractions the reason teens don't worry about the effect we have on our environment?

Although technology greatly impacts how we live our lives and it has helped facilitate our everyday tasks, I believe youth's reliance on it perpetuates inaction. In turn, this reliance has negatively impacted our environment. People stopped noticing nature even more with the development of the computer. This leap in technology enables us to see images of any landscape instantaneously and allows them to ignore our rivers running dry from environmental contamination. Computers, cell phones, cars, the Internet and many other revolutionary inventions lead to people cooped up indoors and tuning out the beauty of nature.

Instead of going outside and exploring nature, we stay indoors and submerge ourselves into the world of the Internet. Our everyday use of so many machines has also changed our social lives.

This "virtual social life" distracts us from what is really going on in the world. We ignore the events that affect us daily and allow them to progress as time goes on. The Internet plays a major role in shaping our society and world.

The cars of a big city like Fresno greatly contribute to the poor air quality in our area.

Another great contributor to our air quality is the valley's geography. Fresno is surrounded by mountains that cause smog to accumulate here.

"At one point my son was in the hospital for five days because of an asthma attack," said Kimberly Hau, Edison High School's Environmental Awareness Club adviser. Learning about Hau's experience with environmental health effects, it was horrifying to find that more than one fifth of all children in the valley suffer from asthma and that this is a part of everyday life for many living in the Central Valley. The valley's air quality affects us more than we realize and we as a community can work to prevent the health problems that affect us. Fresno's geography cannot be changed but what Fresno's community is doing can be improved.

"There are several governmental and nonprofit organizations

that are concerned with the environment and helping the environment," said Hau. Due to Fresno's chronic pollution, organizations and governmental agencies like Valley Air Quality Control Board, the Department of Fish and Game, Cal Trans, San Joaquin River Parkway & Conservation Trust, I Bike Fresno and Fresno's Department of Public Utilities

Fresno's geography cannot be changed but what Fresno's community is doing can be improved.

Continued on page 29

How **Fresno** **Parks** *Rank Up*

Fresno's 62 city parks give us green spaces to exercise, spend time with friends and enjoy nature. They also play a major role in helping us live healthy lifestyles. In a 2012 report, the Trust For Public Land ranked Fresno's parks last in a study on the quality of parks in our nation's large cities. Here are some of the results of that study.

We can all do our part for better parks. Ashley Vargas writes about how the trash in our parks is getting out of hand.

I go to the park every weekend with my little brothers. We sit on a big hill and eat peanut-butter sandwiches. One day my little brothers threw their trash on the ground and I told them to go pick it up. One of my brothers said, "But everyone else leaves their trash on the ground!" and pointed to a McDonalds wrapper. I then looked around and saw beer bottles, cigarette buds, paper plates and more. On the walk home I thought, "I can't believe that people just leave trash for children to kick around." I don't know, maybe it just because I have OCD, but I just couldn't stand to see the park dirty. Dirty parks may not bother you, or maybe you just don't notice but they do bother me. **tk**

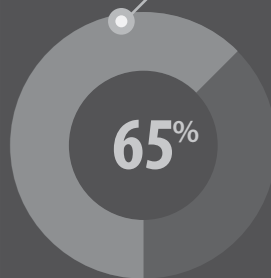


1.3^{per}

10^k



There are fewer than two playgrounds for every 10,000 people.



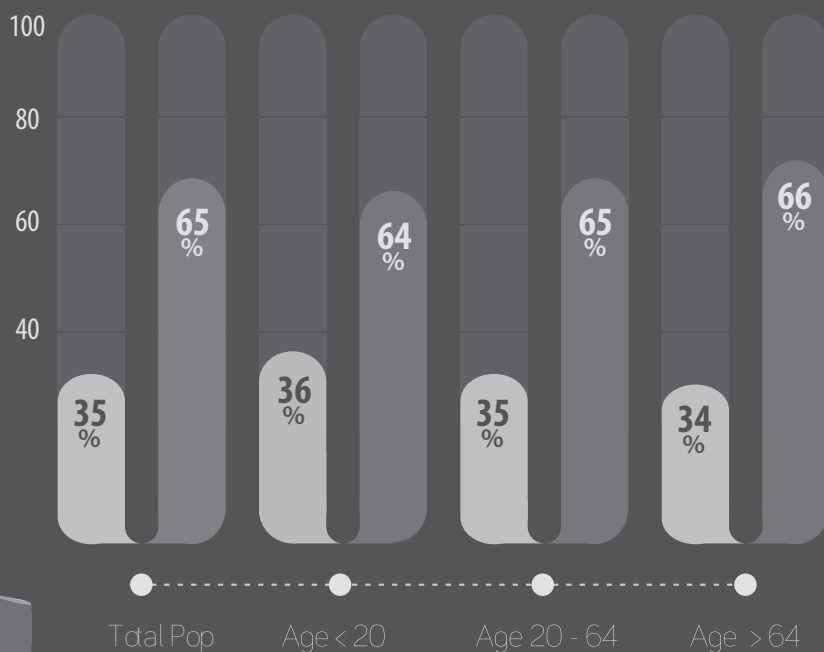
Percent of Fresnans who don't have a park within walking distance.

Edward Park gets 500 visitors per year.



Access to Parks by Age

● -- Has access ● -- Doesn't have access



19 parks in highest poverty area
The rest of Fresno has 43 parks



Neighborhood Poems

“What words describe your neighborhood?”

At the BHC youth jam on Oct 27, we asked Fresno youth this question, and they responded - with poetry.

My neighborhood
is calm,
is retired teachers,

My neighborhood
is drug abuse,
is gang affiliation

My neighborhood
is quiet,
is Neighborhood Watch,

My neighborhood
is empty,
is NOT welcoming

-Jasmine Romero/Winni, Nicolette Hai, Jose Lopez

This world is full of drama
I'm scared

Lots of guns where I stay

School is ghetto

I'm scared

for my siblings

night and day

Empty lots all around

In the same place of struggle

there is potential

-Anonymous

No one goes outside

It's empty

Always smoky

It's polluted

My neighborhood

is small

Our problems

are less

*-Reina Lopez, Mary McGirnie,
Lizzie Merced*



Shaping Futures

By Kevin Shelton

How Boys and Men of Color in Fresno are working to solve a crisis that keeps them and their peers from succeeding.

"As I set foot on camp grounds, I felt a chill of fright, worrying how I would do at the camp given my history of P.T.S.D and blackouts. I was frightened not only by being at an all-male camp, but I was also frightened by my own memories of bad experiences. The fright was so bad I felt disoriented. Even though I mingled and shared names as if I were comfortable, my mind repeatedly played over the images of my abuse and how this destroyed my trust of males." -BMoC Camper

Throughout the streets of Fresno, many ethnically-diverse young men are on the brink of losing a promising future. These artistic, intelligent young men are overcome by destructive messages in their neighborhoods, schools and families. Many of them don't realize that these messages have been passed down through many generations.

Studies show young men of color between the ages of 18-25 are more likely to graduate in prison than they are to graduate from public schools, and African-American students are three times more likely to be suspended than white students. Fresno Unified School District (FUSD) and Fresno in general faces one of the highest rates of this crisis in the West Coast region.

The most critical phase for finding true identity is the teen and young adult years, a time when much personal growth takes place. During this time, 95 percent of teen males have a life-changing identity crisis, and 25 percent lose their life to suicide. Young men who aren't sure of their identity are more likely to fall to peer pressure from gangs, which likely leads to drugs, jail and prison.

More than half of the 95 percent of males with an identity crisis are young men of color. Only one in a group of nine young men of color will succeed in his education. These statistics signal a crisis for ethnically diverse young men.

Many groups across the nation are working on this crisis. In California, groups like The California Endowment (TCE) and PolicyLink form the Alliance for Boys and Men of Color (BMoC), which works to fix the high rates of unhealthy lifestyles among ethnically diverse young men. This Alliance is working in three California cities: Fresno, Los Angeles and Oakland.



Gregorio Montes de Oca leads a BMoC meeting in Fresno.

Photo: Kevin Shelton



Left: A BMoC youth member prepares a skate deck, part of the group's art project, for paint. Middle: BMoC young men meet CA Assemblymembers. Right: A youth at the summer enrichment camp ascends an obstacle course.

BMoC seeks to change the way people view young men of color, both in the present and in future generations. BMoC takes action to build solid relationships, leadership and trust. The Alliance says that its goals for young men of color are simple: Physical and mental health; Safe neighborhoods; Success in school and work; The knowledge, skills and leadership capacity to contribute to their families, communities and the state's social and economic well-being.

The Fresno BMoC campaign is made up of four leaders: Albert Maldonado, Gregorio Montes de Oca, Sarah Reyes and myself. Sarah Reyes, a TCE program officer, told me why she cares about this work. "My older brothers were lost to the prison system," said Reyes. "Every day I wonder what would have been different for them and for me as their younger sister if they were given another option when they made that

At the Fresno BMoC youth group, which meets twice a month, we're giving young men of color a safe environment for them to be themselves.

first mistake."

Reyes' background gives her a sense of urgency in her work with Boys and Men of Color and has inspired her work for diversity rights, which has been ongoing for more than 20 years.

I work as a youth representative for the Fresno BMoC campaign. This role has given me the opportunity to have some amazing

experiences, from a youth enrichment camp in the Sierra Nevada to presenting before members of the California Assembly.

My first encounter with BMoC was this July. I was one of 100 boys and young men of color who camped for a week at Grizzly Creek Ranch in northern Calif. We learned about issues that are unique to young men of color, and we built friendships and bonds. Even though we were strangers when we arrived, we left as a family with common goals. The energy that started at this camp kept growing as BMoC met again in August, this time in Sacramento, as we fought for our voice to be heard by lawmakers. In so doing, five school reform bills passed

with the goal of reducing the high dropout rates that plague young men of color.

On Nov. 27, Oakland's BMoC site held a follow-up event to the Sacramento hearing. This forum addressed policy that will go before the CA Assembly Select Committee on the Status of Boys and Men of Color. The panels discussed health, education and school



discipline, full service schools, employment and juvenile justice/safety. Throughout the many discussions held at the forum, great news was also provided as Ruben Lizardo announced five school discipline reform bills were signed into law this year.

For me, the camp, the hearing before lawmakers in Sacramento and the forum in Oakland was just the beginning as I became involved with a newly-minted group of young men of color in Fresno. This group's leader is Gregorio Montes de Oca, urban fellow with TCE. With his encouragement, I continued to attend forums and youth meetings. My motivation to be a part of this movement comes from my personal background. As a young man of color, I felt a sense of duty to do something to help my peers build a bright future, like the one I enjoy. This feeling of responsibility drives me forward to have courage as a representative in this campaign.

Together we are building a opportunity that will change many lives. At the Fresno BMoC youth group, which meets twice a month, we give young men of color a safe environment for them to be themselves. The group is a place where knowledge, education, leadership

skills and encouragement are plentiful, a group which builds talents and futures, a place where dreams come true and the voices of these young men are heard.

At one of our youth meetings, Gregorio led a discussion about gang violence in Fresno. "The young men did a great job of contributing their personal experiences and ideas as to why violence exists in their community," Gregorio said. That night, Gregorio's cousin was sentenced to many years of prison for his involvement in a gang-related shooting. "I went home that night wondering how my cousin's life could have been different if he had a BMoC youth group to attend in his hometown," Gregorio said.

Gregorio's leadership of the group is oriented around what the young men already care about. "I plan on aligning the youth group around issues that they feel are most pressing to their everyday realities," he said. "Through mentorship and purposeful engagement I hope to see the youth group members build on their leadership capacity and mentor other young men not yet active."

Since this group started, more and more of young men of color have stepped through

our doors. We started with 12 guys and have grown to over 20. Though we're still in the beginning phase, with each meeting the group becomes more solid. The best way to describe it is a place that these young men can finally call home. Our first project together is an art project. We're designing artwork for skateboard decks, which include positive quotes, messages and poems. These skateboards that will later be viewed at Art Hop, a monthly art show, and auctioned off.

To learn more about BMoC in Fresno, contact me at K.shelton957@gmail.com. As a representative of BMoC, I found my place as a leader. Now, my goal is to give others the same opportunity I have in this work of building BMoC. Now tell me, what is yours? **tk**

For more information about BMoC, visit allianceforbmoc.org.

Stronger because of my Family



Growing up in an unstable home helped me learn from my family's mistakes.

By Vincent Salinas

My family has to be the most influential part of my life, and it has shaped me into the person I am now. Though some things may have not been intentional, I still learned from them. I can't say that I haven't wished for a different life or a different family at times. However, as we overcame each problem, and as I grew because of them, I knew I couldn't ask for a better family. We should all take the problems and dilemmas we've endured and the ones our family has endured as a learning experience, and how we, as individuals, can grow from it.

Like many people I know, I grew up without a father. When I was about two months old, my mother left him because he abused her and drugs. It was an environment she did not want me in. She was only about 15, and my father 16, so it shows the courage she had and how hard it must've been to make a decision like that at such an early age.

Growing up without my dad was a struggle. I always longed for someone to fill his spot and show me affection only a father can show his son. He was always in and out of prison for various crimes, such as drug abuse and assault. However, not having him there and knowing what he was going through made me stronger. At a young age I promised myself I would never get in trouble with the law and would maintain a strong sense of integrity. Because of that, now I am striving to join the Marines and later on join the Police Academy and become a Peace Officer.

My childhood consisted of living with my grandparents and my moving place to place with my mother. My grandfather was an alcoholic and my grandmother abused drugs. They would constantly fight and would throw whatever they could find at each other. I don't think I can recall how many times I dialed 911 to get help as a child.

I lived, slept and ate in the living room, and our couch was my bed, so I was always in the middle of the constant fights and antagonizing words. Even though as a kid I viewed them in a negative way, since they were always fighting and doing bad things, they are one of the most important parts of my life. Even though they had problems and struggled with addiction, they kept principles and beliefs that they passed down to me. Through their substance abuse, I learned to stray from drugs and alcohol. I lived in an environment where it is was easy as asking a friend or picking a phone and calling someone to access drugs or alcohol, and it was hard to make that choice. Have it not been for me being exposed to such a reality and seeing the effects up close, I believe I would have fallen to addiction one way or another.

I've attended at least six different elementary schools in Fresno County. My mom and I would constantly move, as she would always have different management jobs in various apartment establishments. I really never had a close friendship or relationship with anyone other than my mom, as the friendships I would make would be lost since I moved a lot. My education didn't fall behind, as I was I would always catch on or learn things I would miss otherwise on the spot. It was only during my early high school years that I was affected. Even at that, she would always be busy working, and I would either be home alone or with one of her friends.

Often times I felt neglected and deprived of a childhood, because at the time I couldn't understand and appreciate that my mother was ultimately doing what she could to support the both of us. It made me realize that everything had a purpose, although it wasn't always clear at the time.

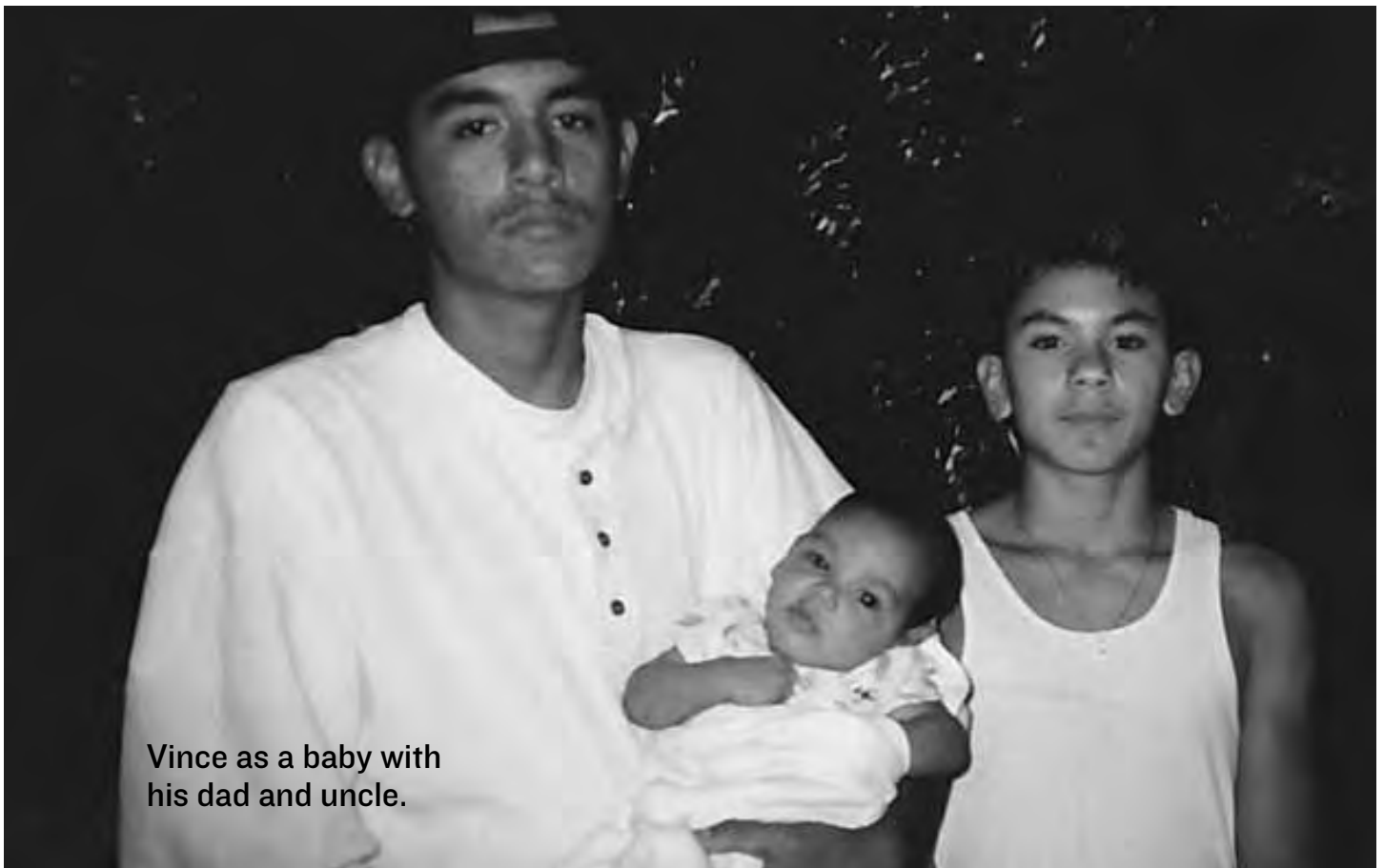
Although living like I did bred some bad habits and negative compulsions, there were also benefits. I was able to develop a different

perspective on things and mainly my life. I was able to cope with my emotions and deal with problems I couldn't otherwise. It made me appreciate the little things and life and not to take things for granted, especially the actions of others just to get me by.

It wasn't always easy, and there was a point where I just wanted to give up. The problems and stress felt so overwhelming and encumbering, but I stayed strong. I strived to understand how certain events happened and deal with their consequences. I was lucky enough to have my mom. I realized I needed to be strong not only for me but for her. Sadly, not everyone is as fortunate as I am. Hardship is something you will encounter in your life. Everyone has been through it at one point or another, but we all get through it, one step at a time. It's not something you can suddenly get over, but with the help of our friends, family and loved ones we overcome and grow from the experience.

If I could have you take anything from this piece I would want you to leave with a different perspective, and show appreciation with all things in your life. Life may not be easy, it may get rough, it may kick you when you're down, but it is worth fighting for. You have to strive to reach your dreams and be strong not only for yourself but for others around you. Take the lead and charge ahead, be the person you've always wanted to be and don't let anyone or anything hold you down. If you ever find yourself in a predicament or problem that just seems to have you overburdened, just take a deep breath and realize that eventually things will get better. Learn from your problems, take your time and solve it. Grow from it and never forget the struggles you endured to make it to where you are now. Appreciate what you have and what you are now earning. Never take anyone or any experience for granted, as there is always something to learn. **tk**

Often times I felt neglected and deprived of a childhood, because at the time I couldn't understand and appreciate that my mother was ultimately doing what she could to support the both of us.



Vince as a baby with his dad and uncle.

The Beat Within

*Writing and art
from the inside.*

The Beat Within, a program of Pacific News Service/New America Media, provides writing workshops and a weekly publication for incarcerated youth nationwide. In 2012, The Beat Within provided 400 workshops a month to 5,000 youth in these programs. The weekly Fresno Beat program, supported by Focus Forward, The kNOw staff and volunteers, is one of the 25 Beat Within programs in juvenile justice centers.

Make You Smile

I will walk the many miles if that meant seeing you guys smile. I will mend your broken dream if that meant seeing you guys smile. I will be the leader you need if that meant seeing you guys smile. I will cry those falling tears if that meant seeing you guys smile. I will show you the love you need if that meant seeing you guys smile. I will be the big sister that you want if that meant seeing you smile. I will take your pain and hurt if that meant seeing you guys smile. I will do anything to make you smile.

-*street name removed

Choices

Everything in life is based on choices. There are good choices and bad choices. For instance, if you hang around bad people, you'll start making bad choices. If you hang around drug users, you'll eventually try drugs, or, if they gang bang you, you will get involved too. But if you hang out with good people, nothing but positive things will come. Like me, I was pretty much a good kid, but I made a bad choice and ended up at the wrong place, at the wrong time. Now they're trying to sentence me to eight years and 10 months. I've already served five and a half months and I regret my choices I've made almost every day.

-Dominic

Not A Game

Before I wake, is it up? I think about the dream again,
This life is more as a play through as it is just pretend.
Now before I lay myself to sleep,
From this darkness I ascend,
My world is stuck on repeat,
This perspective I condemned,
Like this life is burned on fire,
I repent on my desire,
So take this lighter,
Raise it higher,
Put your hands up you're a fighter,
Never stop until you die.

-Phuongmo

Violence and Poverty

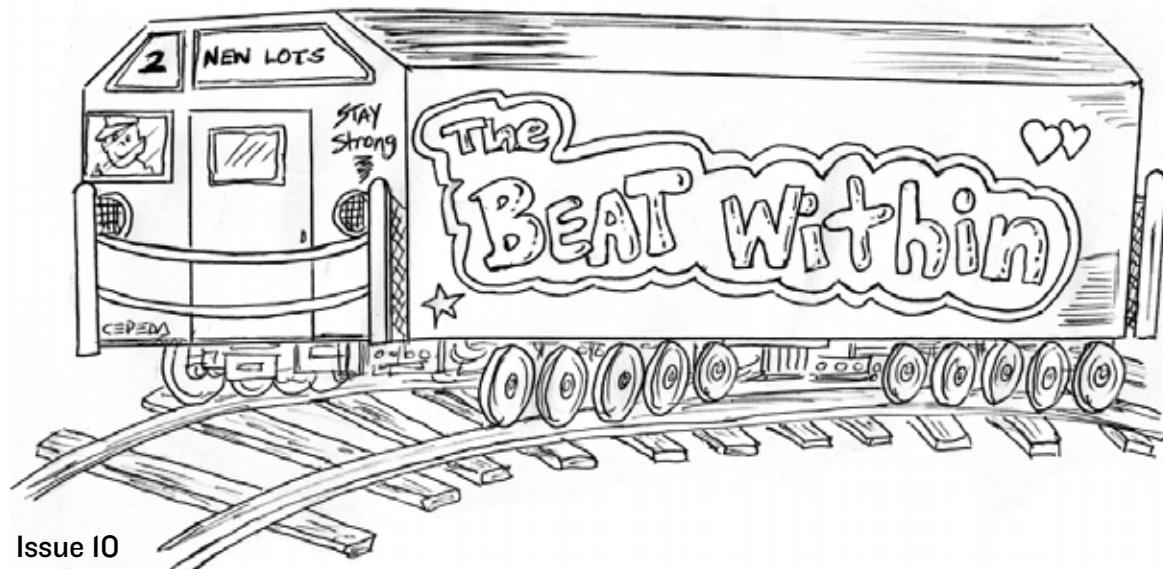
When you get up in the morning and don't know where to go with nothing to feed your children. I think that they should let people get free food. They don't have to pay money or let people get money but only the people that don't have money or jobs. It will be better if food could come down to don't have to pay money for it. People have to take food or get money from people to get food. There are so many more homeless people than people who have jobs. It sucks not to have money. Kids have to fight for their food and some kids don't eat anything. Personally...I was scared! I started to hang out with people like my mom and saw the pain they went through.

My situations are family problems. Mother still does drugs to this day...Father found a new family living happy and sober...brother and sister in foster care with the same foster parent.

My dreams are to graduate high school into college and to have a better life than I did as a child...I don't want to be like my mother...but I ended up in juvenile hall.

-Loushann Poaada tk

Artwork: The Beat Within





Generations of Health

By Miguel Bibanco

“Como que no lo puede comer!?” (What do you mean he can’t eat it!?) This was my mother’s first reaction to meeting a vegetarian friend of mine. She had difficulty in understanding self-imposed dietary restrictions so she would ask, “Es alergico?” (Is he allergic?) while she would offer to make him anything else he was in the mood for... things like pork chops, chicken, or some of yesterday’s leftover albondigas (soup made with meatballs).

My mother was the type of person who loved to cook for others and would be more than happy to give you big helpings and seconds, so the concept of having someone refuse food was quite foreign to her. She thought that my friend was simply being shy so she tried to coax him into eating.

I actually had a lot of difficulty in explaining vegetarianism to my mom. At the time I found it odd that my mother had never before encountered a vegetarian, but I found it understandable seeing as she had grown up in a small rural community in Mexico for most of her life. She simply didn’t have the exposure to the world.

As I grew up I began to notice that it wasn’t just my mother who wasn’t familiar with the culture that had developed within my timeline. I met people who had no idea how to use a computer, didn’t know why Chuck Norris is so awesome and had different ideas about what being healthy means. I asked myself why all my friends and I seemed to be on the same page while others simply couldn’t relate to us. There are many barriers to understanding others: culture, upbringing and preferences all play a role, but I finally realized that the biggest factor concerning whether or not others could relate is most often their age. It makes sense, doesn’t it? How many times have you seen teenagers on television who are completely misunderstood by their parents? Here’s a better question: How many times

have you felt misunderstood by your parents? Parents sometimes tell their children, “There is nothing that you’re going through that I didn’t experience when I was your age.” I don’t think things stay the same across generations. We see a shift, not only in trends but also in behaviors, attitudes and even what is considered healthy.

The truth is in recent years our society has witnessed a dramatic change. As we notice advances in technology and new ways of going about our everyday business we also see changes in people. We begin to observe the generational gap that widens as our ever-accelerating lifestyles separate the newest generations from the ones that have gone before them. We see this quite evidently when we begin to compare our current age group to the ones before it.

In previous generations, finding someone who would spend several hours on a computer doing nothing but “liking” people’s statuses and gallivanting about on various social media like would be quite rare whereas it is the norm for many youth. This is just one example of how people change through different times. We also begin to see changes in the attitudes of people: behaviors that might have been considered unacceptable in the past now become the norm and past behaviors might become outdated or unfashionable. Examples of this include trends in fashion and what exactly is morally acceptable. You don’t see many people walking around with parachute

Generations of Health pants these days, do you? We also see that many young people these days engage in behaviors that would be considered unacceptable in the past. Like the way we dance or the way we go about our romantic relationships. What young people like me need to realize is that we are seen through a lens that will define us as we develop and that what we do and how we are seen could have a considerable impact on our futures.

Our generation is known as the “Millennial” generation, or Generation Y (born between 1983 and 2000). Our generation is young, tech savvy, individualistic and generally not afraid to speak our mind. With many of us in our teens to mid twenties, but what makes our generation what it is? Generations are characterized by many different factors, like the impact technology has on us and our cultural identity. In these respects we are drastically different than past generations. We are seen as being connected to technology with the Internet having a large impact on our lives, but there is more to our generation than just that. We are entering a period in time where we might begin to notice the differences in our age groups. Let us compare our state of health now to how it was in the past. What do we do as an age group to stay healthy? Are we healthier than our parents, have our Internet surfing and video game playing ways finally caught up to us?

On the topic of physical health we notice that the obesity epidemic, which has just eclipsed the global hunger crisis, isn't slowing down one bit. Even if my generation doesn't fully understand the problem we have a much better understanding of the issue now than others did in the past. What I am trying to say is that with all the advances in technology and research the information is out there. We know how to calculate exactly how much of a nutrient our bodies should be taking in and how that differs from person to person, yet we seldom take advantage of this knowledge, distracted by a sea of irrelevant information. We are also misguided by the metaphorical highways that our society has created. Our society has created a culture in which unhealthy behavior is rewarded and healthy behavior is seen as much too

cumbersome to warrant an attempt. Fast food is cheap, plentiful and can taste pretty good. On the other hand healthy food is hard to obtain, hard to prepare and might not taste as good as that bacon cheeseburger – at least that's the way it feels, if you don't know which healthy food to eat and how to prepare it. I am sure I'm not the only person who has decided that they were OK with having McDonalds for dinner because it was right across the street, was cheap and tasted better than Cup Noodles. We must begin to realize that we are in a cycle of unhealthy behavior that will continue unless we are the ones who say stop.

The Millennial generation is making progress. I see a growing number of people learning about what's in their food. They care about what they are eating and take the time to eat fresh and stay fit. Certainly not everyone fits into this category of health conscious individuals, but some do.

There is obviously a lot our age group has to learn from previous generations, but learning can be a two-way street. We might not have as much experience as those who are older than us in some areas, but the situations we deal with are very different because we live in such a rapidly changing world. Older generations must begin to see, and my generation must accept that just because we are younger doesn't automatically mean our opinion is invalid. We must begin to realize that we are two separate groups living in the same place.

Both our generations might not be a perfect picture of what is acceptable to the other, and maybe our behavior is as strange to each other as vegetarians are to my mother, but that is why we must learn to cohabitate in a positive way. This will happen when our elders realize that we are no less valid as members of this society

than they are. My generation must realize that we have a responsibility to build this era in a way that those who come after us will be able to benefit from our work and continue our progress in a positive way. **tk**

Generations are characterized by many different factors, like the impact technology has on us and our cultural identity.

Thank you.

We're honored to work alongside these partners:

The Fresno Bee, Victim Offender Reconciliation Program, The Alliance for Boys and Men of Color, Community Media Access Collaborative, Central California Regional Obesity Prevention Program, YouthWire, Youth Leadership Institute, Californians for Justice, Center for Multicultural Cooperation, Building Healthy Communities, Creative Fresno, The Normal School Literary Magazine, Focus Forward and The Beat Within.



On Nov. 26, native Chinook salmon were re-introduced to the San Joaquin River, restoring one part of the environment in our Valley.

Photo: Antelmo Rangel

The Environment (DPU) - Solid Waste Division are working toward raising awareness, cleaning up the city, and developing new ways to improve our environment.

National Geographic recently noted Fresno's environmental efforts.

The article highlighted that "Fresno is among the nation's leaders in recycling," and "diverts a whopping 73 percent of its trash from the landfill." Fresno has made great progress toward making an environmental change in the world with the help of government administered programs. With the threat of the potential privatization of our recycling program it is hard to predict what will become of our city's recycling progress and whether we will continue to be a leader in recycling.

After learning of the many professional organizations involved in improving the health of Fresno's environment, I wondered if any young people were doing their part to help. I became connected to Edison High School Environmental Awareness Club to learn about the effort they're making.

"The easiest and most effective way to get teens involved in our environmental conservation effort is to inform and encourage them through clubs," said Darlene Avila, President of Edison High School's Environmental Awareness Club. "Clubs at school and in the community motivate those who are in them. Youth work together as a

whole for the better of the community or to accomplish the goal they are set out to reach."

Teens are aware of how grave the conditions are for the environment but their definition of helping is usually raising awareness through social

websites. This is a good first step, but in order to truly make a change in the world it's also necessary to take action. Teens need to move the social movement forward but also contribute more to the physical part of it.

As teenagers it might seem as if we aren't impacting our community because we are not yet adults. The reality is that we are the future and what we believe and support is what will shape our world. The little things that we can do, such as reusing bottles, recycling cans and using our own durable bags when grocery shopping are of great importance.

These actions are small and don't bring about immediate change, but the idea behind them is powerful. By taking a bit of time to accomplish these tasks you can influence others to make change. Once you influence someone else they will influence another and the domino effect takes place, because they'll realize how important and effective one person's actions can be to the movement. When we have the same amount of people acting to care for the environment as have people talking about it, will we have truly made a difference on our planet.

tk

Teens need to move the social movement forward but also contribute more to the physical part of it.

Young Gangsters

Tagger crews are basically small groups of people, usually males 14 and older with great artistic talent who go about the streets finding territory in the area to tag. Their work can be art or pictures that send out good or rebellious messages. The main difference between a tagger crew and a gang is the size, as tagger crews can be much smaller than gangs. Tagger crews are also not affiliated with more serious criminal acts, although getting caught in the act of painting graffiti can be punished by some fines, jail time or involuntary community service.

Gabe Hernandez, a minister with Fresno/Madera Youth For Christ, once was a part of the gang life. He was a spokesman for his gang, and he told me when the people in his crew did something wrong, like gave out information about a recent activity or showed disrespect, he was sent out to set them straight.

Gabe was born and raised in Fresno on Tyler Avenue. He joined in as part of a tagger crew when he was about 13 because he felt that he needed to be part of something due to his parents divorcing. His initiation was to rob a mini mart. His first jump-in was at 16 and he became part of the East Side Lewis Street Bulldogs. He was sent to prison on charges of kidnapping, car theft and robbery. While he was in the isolation cell he was crying out to God and later found him and became a man of Christ. He soon dropped out of the gang when he was 25.

When he was a young gangster his main objective was to have his crew's back, put in work when needed, and make sure his rag never touched the ground. Every Bulldog-affiliated gangster owns a Red Rag (bandana) that they wear. If their rag ever touches the ground it is a sign of disrespect, punishable by a beating from their mates. Gabe explained why he didn't like being a "spokesman" for the gang. "When you're

only 100 deep, every homie counts, so you give a piece of your heart... to every single person, at least I did man, I can't speak for everybody."

For some time he was under the influence of meth. He later dropped all of these troublesome addictions when he returned home from prison, but even now he still deals with death threats from the gangsters he left behind.

The positive story of successfully leaving a gang, as Gabe did, can be tainted with the fear of retribution from gang members, especially if they think an ex-member has snitched. Those suspected of "snitching" risk being beaten or murdered. Even renouncing one's gang ties can bring trouble, like in the case of 17-year-old boy who, on October 31st, was stabbed repeatedly in Hanford for disavowing his gang affiliation.

Gabe, a former gang member, now works with Youth For Christ and influences young people in a positive way.



I have seen the trouble gang members go through in the long run and how they end up in bad positions in life. I have an uncle that was with the Bond Street Bulldogs and now he struggles with the consequences in his personal life and family. The police are always on his back, and it affects all of us in his family and puts us in quite a bit a danger of being caught between gang violence. I think out of all of us, it affects my grandmother the most, because she lives with the fear that he could one day be put to death because of his gang affiliation.

Like Gabe, I myself was asked to join a gang when I was in junior high. The guys who asked me were a couple of boys I was friends with for a while, and they said they were part of the East Side Bulldogs. They thought they could use me as a tagger after they discovered I was a good artist, but I refused, because I knew that no good would come out of it. I realized that you don't have to join a family of crime to feel like you're a part of something, because you can be part of so much greater. tk

Want to learn more about gang prevention? Visit

- fcgpc.org
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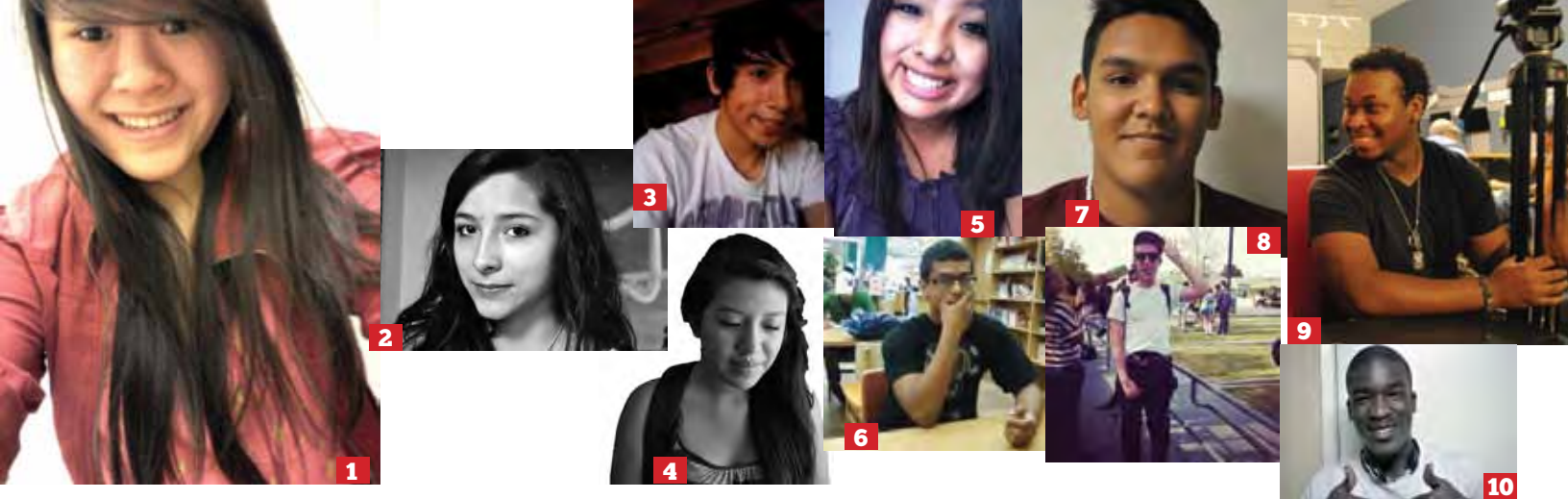
or contact the hotline at (559)-621-6211

Financial Aid excel.

Those in charge of allocating aid ought to reflect deeply on the financial factors of attending college that may ultimately determine whether a student furthers their education. If granted financial assistance, the student should be able to first show how they will properly apply their aid even before they prove the lack of income within their household. Merit-based aid should be just as closely scrutinized and harshly reviewed. For the time being, roughly equal distribution among both merit and need-based aid is the most practical application.

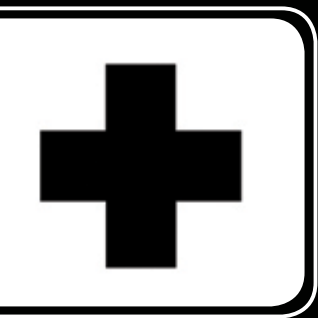
My aid experience has taught me much. It's an effort that requires persistence. Students who are most likely to feel excluded from attending

college deserve to know that even when the process is overwhelming, getting aid is possible. I also believe the financial aid system requires new oversight and revision. The system will continue to seem unfair until those who allocate funds make the process more open to students who can prove themselves ready to excel and succeed. Until this time, we as students will attempt to prove ourselves worthy. tk



Contributors

1 Christina Tran is 17 years old and is a senior at Edison High School. She joined The kNow Youth Media in June 2012 as a new opportunity to explore the unknown. Her goal is to attend college next year. **2 Ashley Vargas** is 15. She joined The kNow Youth Media in July 2012. Ashley attends ACEL Charter High School, located in Downtown Fresno. She is on her way to becoming a star photographer. **3 Antonio Flores** is 17 years old. He was born and raised in Fresno, California and is a junior at ACEL High School. Antonio's strengths lie in music composition, videography and art. **4 Jane Carretero** is a Freshman at Edison High School. She is 15 years old and joined The kNow Youth Media in February 2012. She was recently published in The Fresno Bee in The kNow's series on Restorative Justice. **5 Adriana Hernandez** is 17 and will graduate from Edison High School in 2013. She loves baking, hiking and dreams of becoming an architect in the future. She is president of Edison's French club, a competitor in Science Olympiad and a great journalist in the making. **6 Miguel Bibanco** joined The kNow in 2010. He attends Edison High and will graduate in 2013. Miguel has been an integral young leader in Fresno's Building Healthy Communities and served a two-year term as a member of the BHC Hub. He has also spoken before the Sacramento legislature while working with the Alliance for Boys and Men of Color. **7 Vincent Salinas** is a 17-year-old senior at Edison High. He aspires to join the Marines and later join the police academy and become a police officer. His overall goal in life is to be able to support the family and wife he wishes to have in the future. If he could choose to start a family anywhere, it would be in Hawaii. He is half Mexican, part Hawaiian, Philipino and Italian. **8 Parker Anderton** is 17 and attends Edison High School. He plans to complete his general education at Fresno City College, then transfer to UC Santa Cruz where he wants to graduate with a degree in Botany and a minor in Art, French, and German. **9 Kevin Shelton**, 19, joined The kNow in 2010. His piece "Tagging: The Good and The Bad" was awarded Runner-Up for Outstanding Youth Voice in the 2011/2012 NAM Ethnic Media Awards for Northern California & Central Valley. He was recently hired to the BMOC Youth Leader position. **10 Phillip Omeje** is 16 years old and attends Edison High School. He has been a The kNow Youth Media member since 2012.



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